



RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

HOUSE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

SUBMITTED FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2020

I am Cinde Weatherby, forwarding information as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas (LWVTX) in response to the Committee's Formal Request for Information regarding three interim charges to the House Elections Committee. We appreciate the opportunity to add our voice and information to your collection of information regarding these three important charges. Thank you.

LWVTX submits to the Committee that each charge in the Committee's Request for Information reflects the need for modernizing our state's elections system.

In recent times, our own organization faced the same need. Upon fully embracing modernization of our systems, we see a drastic improvement in member and public engagement. It also empowers us to assist the public in directly connecting to the official and factual resources of the Secretary of State and county election offices. The worldwide health crisis exponentially magnifies the need for safe, modern systems in every aspect of our state's voting process. For Texas to best serve its citizens, LWVTX suggests that the House Elections Committee interim report emphasize this overarching need for special attention during the 87th Session to issues enumerated in each of the three interim charges.

Interim Charge 1

LWVTX performs a detailed review of the Secretary of State and all 254 county election websites prior to each election. Major progress has been recorded since initiating the review in 2016. County election officials tell us that sharing the review results creates a positive competition among counties that promotes improvement. However, more improvement is required. The Texas Association of Counties also contributes to the improvement of this important link between citizens and their election officials.

Incorporation of HB 933 and HB 1421 Website Requirements

Following passage of HB 933 and HB 1421, LWVTX incorporated the additional website requirements in the November 2019 election website review. We found most counties needed to update their websites to be in compliance with new election laws, as detailed in the [report](#)ⁱ. (see page 14). We found 202 counties provided information on polling locations, 192 included dates and times and 186 provided sample ballots. Only 55 provided details on election judge and clerk training, and precinct boundary changes.

Providing safe and accurate election information should be a priority for county election officials. Of the 254 counties, 201 of them have a website labeled “not secure.” Only 9 counties provide a secure site where voters can be confident with a government-verified DotGov domain. Of the 254 county websites, many have URLs ending in “.com,” “.net,” “.org,” and “tx.us.”

LWVTX performed its next comprehensive county website review in preparation for the March 2020 primaries. *The League of Women Voters of Texas* [2020 Texas Primary County Election Website Review](#)ⁱⁱ documents results. In March, the review used the League's [Checklist for County Election Websites](#)ⁱⁱⁱ and [2020 Suggested Best Practices for County Election Websites](#)^{iv}.

The March review also included comments on the Texas Secretary of State's voter education website, votetexas.gov^v.

LWVTX recommended the following:

1. Update the mobile view of votetexas.gov for consistency, ease of use and accuracy.

While the votetexas.gov^{vi} website is rated mobile friendly, we are very concerned that the same page when viewed on a mobile phone looks entirely different and provides buttons referencing 2017 Harvey hurricane voters.

2. Update the Texas Electionnet Administrative System MVP^{vii} page to force mobile-friendly voters to use this site to check registration status, polling place locations.

Neither are mobile friendly. Improvements are also needed to assure the TEAM MVP page and votetexas.gov to handle high volume demand during elections.

The March 2020 review found overall improvements in the county election websites with a tripling of the number of outstanding and very good websites. However, the majority of county websites (159) were rated good to inadequate.

Some highlights:

- The ease of finding voting information on the website improved from 2016 when only 74 counties used an identifiable word like voting or election. In March 2020, 207 counties made it easier for voters to find voting information.
- Making websites secure is still an issue. In the March 2020 review, 183 counties (down from 202 in 2019) continue with a website labeled “not secure” using a “HTTP” website URL rather than the more secure “HTTPS”.
- Most counties continued to omit information to comply with new election laws. Voting and election information are critical to allow citizens to participate in our democracy.
- With the 2019 review demonstrating 80 percent of websites met the mobile use function, we did not repeat that test.
- We found that 129 counties provided voting and election information for voters with disabilities, 96 for voters in the military or overseas, and 31 for students or first time voters.
- Only 61 percent (155 counties), provided any information in Spanish. “State and federal laws require all voting materials to be translated into Spanish statewide” according to [SOS Election Advisory No. 2015-05^{viii}](#).
- Only 69 percent or 174 counties provided a direct link to the Texas Secretary of State voting webpages, www.votetexas.gov.

Limited July 2020 Primary Runoff Election Survey Key Results

LWVTX conducted its [sixth survey of Texas county websites^{ix}](#) prior to July 14, 2020.

The full July [2020 Texas County Election Website Safety Review is available here^x](#). This review was narrow in scope, focusing on the information counties provided voters regarding the impact of COVID-19 on voting and elections. Thirty counties ranked "Outstanding" in this review.

The survey found many counties provided voters with safe voting options and voter safety education on the election websites. Additionally, the Texas Secretary of State’s voter information website (votetexas.gov) responded to the increased public interest in voting by mail by adding a direct link to detailed information about the process and the Application for Ballot By Mail (ABBM) form.

While it is good news that 65 percent (166 out of 254 counties) provided a Vote By Mail link or voter education, only 27 percent of Texas counties provided adequate safe voting information. In addition, only 69 counties provided information on election worker training which is critical to election worker recruitment and training in the time of the pandemic of 2020. In our review prior to the November 2020 election, we will continue to look for improvements to this critical election website component.

